

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
EUGENE DISTRICT OFFICE

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
DOI-BLM-ORWA-E050-2016-0022-EA

South Ridgeline/Thurston Hills Wildland Urban Interface Fuels Reduction Environmental Assessment

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Historically, the approach to fire management has been one of full or modified suppression for all wildfires; therefore, very limited fuels management has occurred. As a result, there have been numerous and extensive wildfires in the past ten years and greater emphasis has now been placed on wildfire rehabilitation and hazardous fuels reduction. The South Ridgeline/Thurston Hills Wildland Urban Interface Fuels Reduction Project (SRTH WUI Project) is a cooperative venture between the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Eugene District, the City of Eugene (City), Oregon, and the Willamalane Park and Recreation District (Willamalane) of Springfield, Oregon to reduce wildfire threats and losses to communities and natural resources. The BLM provides community assistance funding and support for prevention, mitigation, education, and outreach regarding wildfire through its fuels management program.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA), (DOI-BLM-ORWA-E050-2016-0022-EA), for the SRTH WUI Project, which analyzed the effects of the proposed action and no action alternative. On the basis of the information contained in the EA, and all other information available to me, it is my determination that the implementation of Alternative 2 would not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and to the intensity of the impacts as described in the EA.

CONTEXT

The SRTH WUI Project EA has been prepared to analyze the proposed project to reduce hazardous fuels in the WUI on approximately 1,700 acres of lands owned by the City and Willamalane in and around the communities of Eugene and Springfield, Oregon. The Proposed Action would include:

- Thinning of small (<12 in. DBH) and medium (12-20 in. DBH) trees and shrubs
- Mowing and mastication of grass, weeds, brush, and other woody fuels
- Piling and burning of weeds, brush, and other woody fuels
- Chipping or grinding of small trees, brush, and other woody fuels
- Seeding and planting of propagules (native species)
- Propane flaming of non-native plants
- Prescribed burning to manage thatch and woody vegetation regrowth

This project is a site-specific action that by itself does not have international, national, region-wide, or statewide importance. The actions described in the action alternative would be limited in scope and

geographic application (40 CFR 1508.27(a)). The location of the action is described in the EA (p. 1) and displayed on maps (EA, pgs. 2 and 3). The physical and biological effects are limited. The affected environment sections of Chapter 3 in the EA describe the locations and current conditions of the various resources. The resource effects sections in Chapter 3 reveal that most of the direct and indirect environmental effects are confined to the project area with some effects extending slightly outside the project area. The direct and indirect effects of the action alternatives along with cumulative effects (incremental effects of the proposed action in light of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions) for each resource are described in Chapter 3 of the SRTTH WUI Project EA (p. 20-38). These analyses were reviewed in consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) guidance on cumulative effects analysis, and results were disclosed in the EA.

INTENSITY

I have considered the potential intensity of the impacts that would result from the action alternatives relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ, as detailed below (40 C.F.R. § 1508.27(b)):

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The EA considered both potential beneficial and adverse effects for five issues presented in detail project area. The anticipated environmental effects contained in the EA are based on the most current science, professional judgment, and experience of the Interdisciplinary (ID) team and City of Eugene/Willamalane staff. The potential for adverse impacts from the action alternative is similar to other projects previous to this one and are not unique to this project. These impacts are minimized and/or avoided using the Project Design Features (PDFs) found in the EA (pgs. 14-19) In BLM'S experience implementing previous projects, we have found similar activities using these or similar design criteria to be effective in avoiding or minimizing adverse effects. I have determined that none of the direct, indirect or cumulative impacts associated with the proposed action are significant, individually or combined.

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.

No aspect of the action alternatives would have an effect on public health and safety.

The PDFs outlined in the EA would be followed to conduct the proposed hazardous fuel reduction treatments. These features are designed to protect human health and safety. Therefore, the Proposed Action would have minimal effects on public health or safety.

Smoke management from prescribed burning and pile burning would adhere to the Oregon Smoke Management Plan. Adherence to the Oregon Smoke Management Plan would greatly limit smoke dispersal. Due to the combination of burning only on days with stable atmospheric conditions and limited smoke dispersal, there would be no significant impacts on air quality associated with burning, and hence no significant impacts on public health or safety from burning.

No drinking water sources are present in the project area and, therefore, would not be affected by the proposed action.

No herbicides would be used in conjunction with this project. Thus there would be no public health or safety issue presented by the use of herbicides associated with this project.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity of historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

There would be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area such as parklands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas (including areas of Critical Environmental Concern) as there are no such areas in the project vicinity.

No known historic or prehistoric sites are located within the project sites in areas where treatment may occur. Adverse effects to historic and cultural properties would be avoided by project design, so effects from any action alternative are not anticipated.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

The effects that would occur from implementation of the proposed hazardous fuel reduction treatments are well known and understood. This is demonstrated through the "Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences" section in the EA. No unresolved issues concerning the impacts to resources or the human environment were raised following the public outreach process.

Effects are expected to be consistent with those of the published literature cited in the EA, and are not controversial in a scientific sense. The public has had the opportunity to comment on this project during a formal 15-day public comment period on the EA as well as the public participation conducted for the City/Willamalane plans outlined in the EA on page 7. No comments were received during the public comment period.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The Proposed Action has no known effects on the human environment which are considered highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks. This is demonstrated through the "Effects Analysis" section in the EA. The proposed treatments are common actions authorized by the BLM, and similar actions have been implemented in similar areas. The analysis provided in the EA does not indicate that these actions would involve any unique or unknown risks.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

This project neither establishes a precedent nor represents a decision in principle about future actions.

This project will not bind any future BLM actions and will not shape or determine BLM fuels management WUI methods or strategies beyond this project. As with any project, BLM would use information learned from implementing the project; this does not mean those learnings commit BLM to any course of action with any future project or overall WUI strategy beyond this individual project, and as such this factor does not weigh in favor of an EIS or raise a serious question on this issue.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

The Interdisciplinary Team evaluated the project in context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions and determined that there is not a potential for significant cumulative effects. There are no individual or cumulatively significant impacts identified by the analysis conducted for the SRTTH WUI Project EA. Cumulative effects analysis for the project area, by Issue, were

presented in Chapter 3 of the EA. Effects from the action alternative were largely localized with minimal impacts outside the project area.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.

No known historic or prehistoric sites are located within the project sites in areas where treatment may occur. During project implementation, if the BLM, City/Willamalane, or equipment operators encounter or become aware of any objects or sites of cultural value, such as historical or prehistorical ruins, graves, grave markers, fossils, or artifacts, all operations would be immediately suspended in the vicinity of the cultural site. The BLM would be notified and a BLM archaeologist would evaluate the site before work could resume in that area. PDFs are outlined in Chapter 2. Therefore, there is no potential for a significant impact related cultural resources

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

There are no threatened or endangered listed, proposed, candidate species or designated critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act (as amended USDI Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) 1973) that occur within the project area or that would be affected from project activities.

The Proposed Action would not violate or threaten to violate any federal, state, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. The Proposed Action is in conformance with all applicable regulations under 43 CFR. The Proposed Action would not violate the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or the Endangered Species Act.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The action alternatives do not threaten to violate any Federal, State, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment including, but not limited to, the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and Endangered Species Act. The action alternatives comply with the 1995 Eugene RMP, which provides direction for the protection of the environment on public lands. Project design criteria listed in the EA would assure compliance with these laws. The EA also meets National Environmental Policy Act disclosure requirements.

Pursuant to Executive Order 13212, the BLM must consider the effects of this decision on the President's National Energy Policy. As there would be no impact to the exploration, development, or transportation of undeveloped energy sources from the proposed action, a Statement of Adverse Energy Impacts is not required.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information contained in the EA (DOI-BLM-ORWA-E050-2016-0022-EA), and all other information available to me, I have determined that the action alternatives would not have a significant impact on the human environment within the meaning of section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. I have determined that the effects of the proposed activities would be consistent with the 1995 Record of Decision/Resource Management Plan for the Eugene District.

Signature of the Responsible Official:



Michael J. Korn
Siuslaw Office Field Manager
Eugene District Office

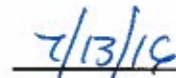


Date:

Signature of the Responsible Official:



William O'Sullivan
Upper Willamette Office Field Manager
Eugene District Office



Date:

